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## CASTS AND TAPESTRY IN ROOM-DECORATION

BY CLARENCE COOK

*Illustrated from photographs of studios of prominent artists.*

I HAVE said elsewhere that the studio is the type of what the living-room in our houses should be. But, all studios are not alike, and the statement, moreover, applies more to houses in the country than to houses in the city.

As we have seen, some studios are festive and ornate, others are severely plain, or even commonplace; and in too many of our pictures they are evidently on dress-parade, and not in their work-a-day attire. Mr. Shirlaw's studio, for example, is much more like one of his own pictures, in its rococo-romantic way of looking at things, than like a working-room. The drapery disposed over the foreground-chair in such a carefully careless fashion—no doubt a handsome piece of stuff, making an effective note in the general color-scheme—has just received the photographer's tip to look as pleasant as it can; and the piano's little daughter Mandolina is also posing in childish self-consciousness, resting against her mother's knee. The piano itself, with its harp-shaped top, is a rather fantastic-looking instrument—legitimate enough perhaps, since the piano-forte is merely a harp placed longitudinally, but we have always a little feeling of incongruity in these reversions.

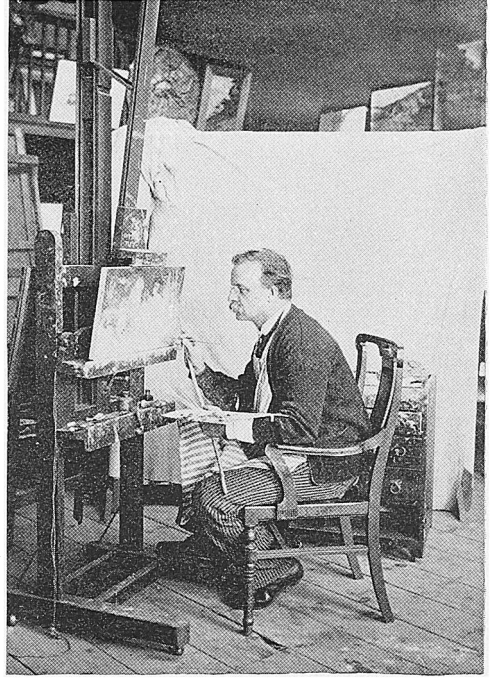
If the making of a picture were all Mr. Shirlaw had in view, he has no doubt succeeded as well here as he does elsewhere: few of our men have his native turn for picture-making. The picturesqueness of this studio comes mostly from the tapes-



STUDIO OF WALTER SHIRLAW

try—a piece of Beauvais, we take it—covering the end-wall and partly serving as a *portière*. Cover it up with the hand and see how little individuality remains to distinguish this studio from many another. The value of tapestry as a background is so well understood nowadays by artists, and people with artistic tastes, that it is coming to be very difficult to find specimens that are within the reach of ordinary purses. For stately, splendid pieces, fit to cover the sides of big rooms, as the demand, even in this land of the new-rich, is less, they are not so hard to find; but the kind that artists love, the incoherent, faded, ill-used sort, such as, when skillfully cleaned and darned, make a soft, rich, autumnal background for paintings, prints, casts, mirrors—fortunate is he who, seeking or not seeking, lights on such a piece. Nothing else, that he could put upon his wall would replace it in his fancy.

It has often seemed to me as if Frederick S. Church had found the motive



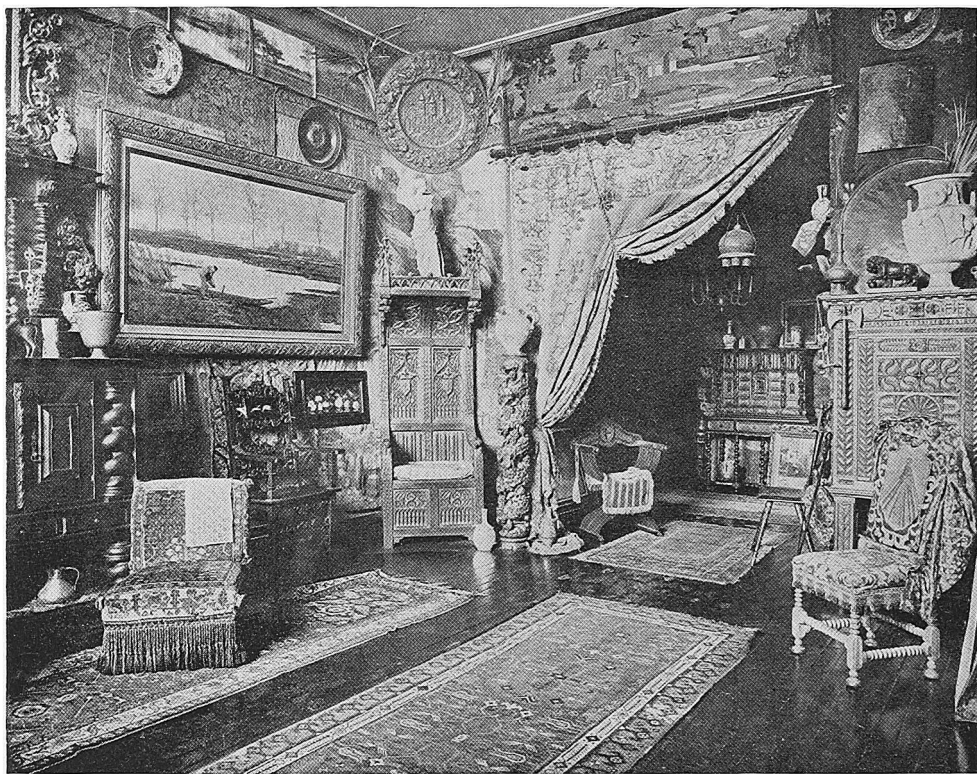
PORTRAIT OF FREDERICK S. CHURCH



STUDIO OF FREDERICK S. CHURCH

for his delicately tinted, fanciful and admirable, pictures, where the first painters found theirs, in the *bas-relief*, with its sensitive light and shadow, varying with time and seasons. And the picture of his studio seems to support this notion: it has far more the look of a sculptor's work-shop than of a painter's. I am glad to see it, in any case, for it is a good illustration of the decorative use of casts, as yet too little known among us laymen. There was a time when the only casts to be had, even at good shops, were busts of the Greek and Roman celebrities, with a few statues such as the Venus dei Medici, and the Apollo; beyond this the chief stock-in-trade was Canova, now happily gone to the limbo of forgotten things.

Some amusing anecdotes remain of the objections that were made, not so many years ago, by well-meaning, over-scrupulous people, to having the casts of



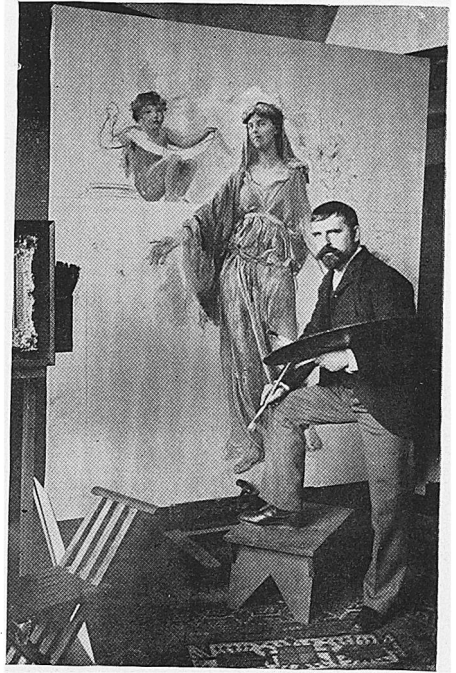
STUDIO OF ROSWELL D. SAWYER

naked gods and goddesses in their houses: the prejudice was one that was long in dying out, and was only another phase of the petty war waging to-day against the *nude*. We are, however, in a far better case to-day than we were five or six years ago. Thanks to the enterprise of the cast-makers and to the good-will of several of our sculptors, who have brought home beautiful examples and have freely allowed the public to share in the copies made of them, we are now able to supply ourselves with casts in delightful variety—not of one school or era only, but of all schools and all eras. We can have Mr. Church's "Victory of Samothrace," the figure with outspread wings and free-flowing draperies, or his "Victory Adjusting Her Sandal," the panel in high relief hanging on the wall, or his *bas-relief* of chil-

dren's heads by Donatello,—if that be the cast we see just above the artist's picture on the easel—these or any of the multitude of beautiful things of the Italian Renaissance: Madonnas of Mino and Donatello and Della Robbia, Singing Children of Donatello, fragments from Ghiberti's Gates; but the list would be long of all the beautiful inexpensive casts that now abound in our cities.

A few of these casts rightly disposed, so as to receive the light suited to them,—it should always come from the side,—add greatly to the attractiveness of any room.

R. D. Sawyer's studio contains a number of handsome things, but few signs of a work-room: the studio-proper is no doubt somewhere round the corner. There is nothing very noteworthy in the room, unless it be the use made of the artist's sketches ranged along the top of the wall like a frieze: this effect is continued over the doorway leading into the smaller room, by what resembles a piece of tapestry: Flemish, per-



PORTRAIT OF WILL H. LOW

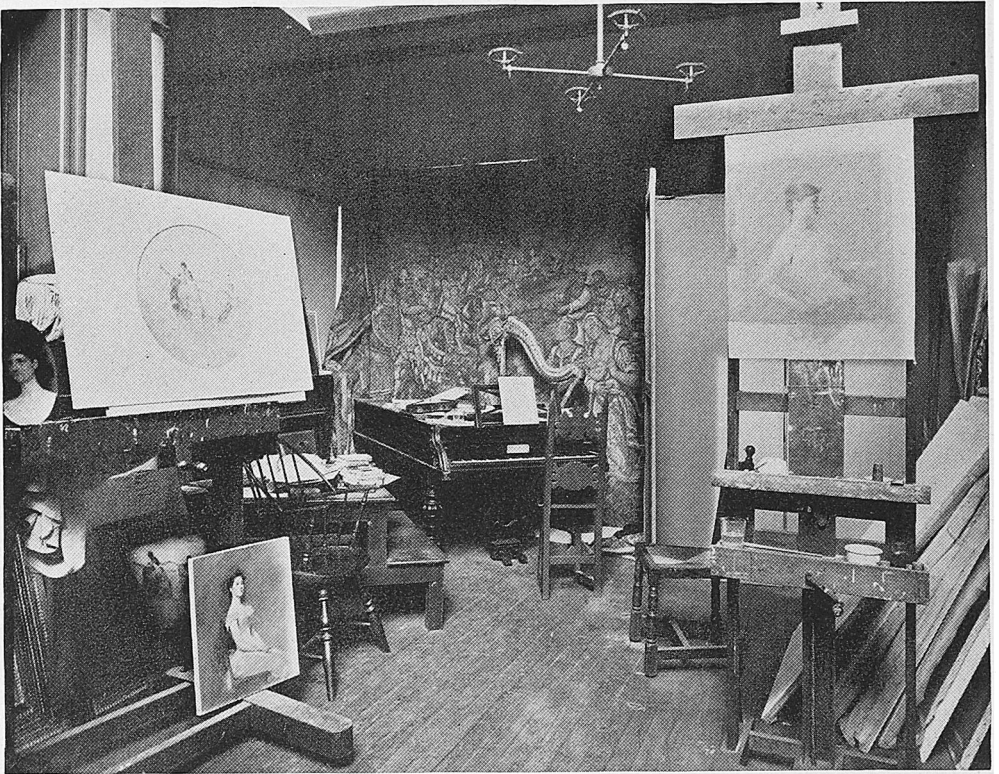


STUDIO OF WILL H. LOW



haps, with Christ and the Woman of Samaria at the well, in an eastern landscape.

This an old Dutch fashion of using pictures: at one time hundreds of them were painted for no other purpose than to be hung over doorways, and many of them may be seen in place to-day in Holland. In a country-house it would be a good use to make of small paintings or water-colors such as, like the Dutch pictures first spoken of, are of no great value in themselves but from mode of treatment become effective seen at some little distance. Of course an artist is at great advantage in such a case over the ordinary layman who has to buy his furnishing instead of merely utilizing his overplus. But, in one case we wot of, a Japanese scroll of about thirty feet long, painted with pots of flowering plants in a gay procession, that had been for several years in a cabinet lazily rolled up (for 'tis no trifle to



STUDIO OF THOMAS W. DEWING

unroll these scrolls and roll them up again) was found to be just the thing needed to liven up a long low room in a country-house, fastened up under the cornice.

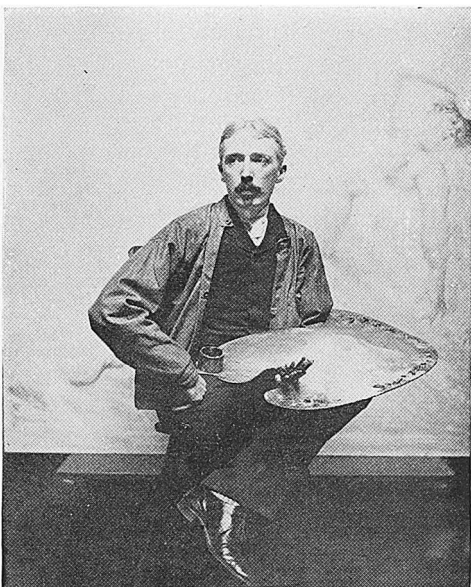
An innovation that has recently appeared in the way of framing the rich and telling photographs of the old masters, now getting to be so delightfully common, is to mount them and frame them *without glass*, in narrow frames of ebonized wood or dark brown with no margin, whatever. As long-shaped photographs, and in small size, of pictures by the Dutch and late Italian masters, are now to be had without much seeking, it would be easily possible to dispose of a number of these in the fashion I describe.

It must not be forgotten that the charm of an artist's studio such as those of

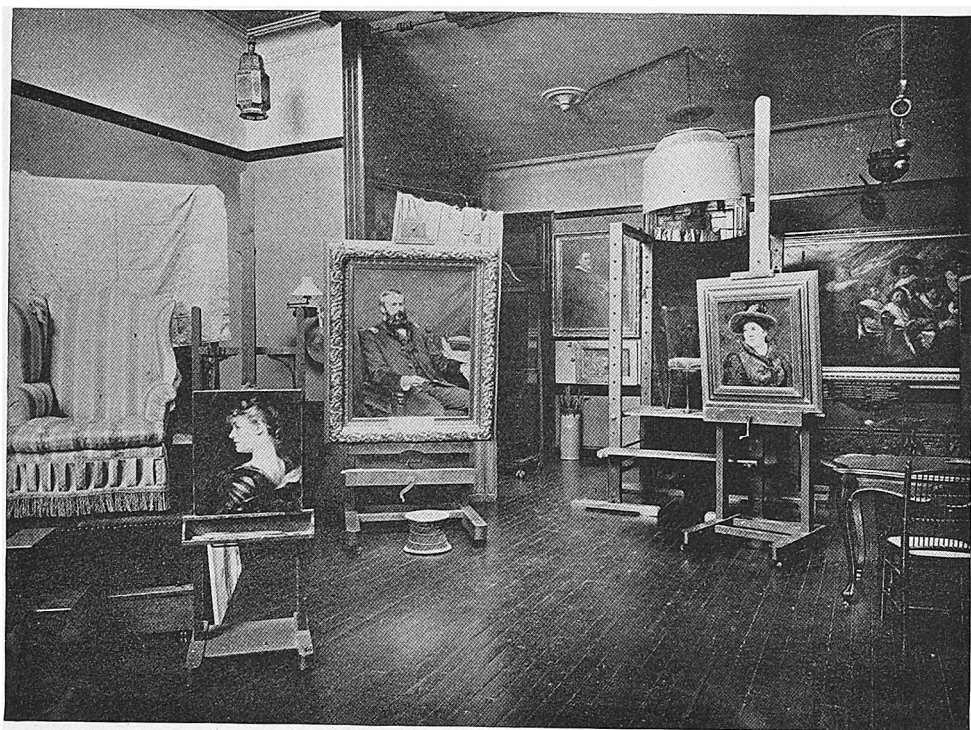
Mr. Chase, Mr. Shirlaw, or Mr. Tiffany, is due to the owner's horror of conventionality, and his feeling for unity and harmony, and so long as these are obtained, and his eye fed and kept in tune, he does not care for the intrinsic value of his belongings, nor is it necessary that apple-pie-order should reign supreme.

Will H. Low and Carroll Beckwith have no mind, evidently, that we should think of anything in their studios but the work they are engaged upon. Mr. Low has perhaps secured a certain unity and more serenity than Mr. Beckwith shows in his very business-like room, but neither of them gives us a hint that we can make use of for our living-room.

Nor can much more be said for T. W. Dewing's studio, except that in the back-ground there seems to be an effective grouping of harp and piano against an old tapestry, suggesting cheerful hours of recreation after the day's hard work.



PORTRAIT OF J. CARROLL BECKWITH



STUDIO OF J. CARROLL BECKWITH